

San Joaquin Valley Groundwater Basin, Madera Subbasin

- Groundwater Subbasin Number: 5-22.06
- County: Madera
- Surface Area: 394,000 acres (614 square miles)

Basin Boundaries and Hydrology

The San Joaquin Valley is surrounded on the west by the Coast Ranges, on the south by the San Emigdio and Tehachapi Mountains, on the east by the Sierra Nevada and on the north by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Sacramento Valley. The northern portion of the San Joaquin Valley drains toward the Delta by the San Joaquin River and its tributaries, the Fresno, Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus Rivers. The southern portion of the valley is internally drained by the Kings, Kaweah, Tule, and Kern Rivers that flow into the Tulare drainage basin including the beds of the former Tulare, Buena Vista, and Kern Lakes.

The Madera subbasin consists of lands overlying the alluvium in Madera County. The subbasin is bounded on the south by the San Joaquin River, on the west by the eastern boundary of the Columbia Canal Service area, on the north by the south boundary of the Chowchilla Subbasin, and on the east by the crystalline bedrock of the Sierra Nevada foothills. Major streams in the area include the San Joaquin and Fresno Rivers. Average annual precipitation is 11 inches throughout the majority of the subbasin and 15 inches in the Sierran foothills.

Hydrogeologic Information

The San Joaquin Valley represents the southern portion of the Great Central Valley of California. The San Joaquin Valley is a structural trough up to 200 miles long and 70 miles wide. It is filled with up to 32,000 feet of marine and continental sediments deposited during periodic inundation by the Pacific Ocean and by erosion of the surrounding mountains, respectively. Continental deposits shed from the surrounding mountains form an alluvial wedge that thickens from the valley margins toward the axis of the structural trough. This depositional axis is below to slightly west of the series of rivers, lakes, sloughs, and marshes, which mark the current and historic axis of surface drainage in the San Joaquin Valley.

Water Bearing Formations

Hydrogeologic units in the Madera Subbasin consist of unconsolidated deposits of Pleistocene and Holocene age. These deposits are divided into continental deposit of Tertiary and Quaternary age, and continental deposits of Quaternary age. Continental deposits of Quaternary age include older alluvium, lacustrine and marsh deposits and younger alluvium. The continental deposits of Quaternary age crop out over most of the area and yield probably more than 95 percent of the water pumped from wells.

Although younger alluvium and flood-basin deposits yield small quantities of water to wells, the most important aquifer in the area is the older alluvium. It consists mostly of intercalated lenses of clay, silt, sand, and some gravel.

The lacustrine and marsh deposits (which contain the E-clay) do not crop out in the area but occur within the older alluvium and underlie the western portion of the subbasin at depths ranging between 150 and 300 feet (DWR 1981). These deposits restrict the vertical movement of ground water and divide the water-bearing deposits into confined and unconfined aquifers. Continental deposits of Tertiary and Quaternary age include the Lone Formation which outcrops on the Subbasin's eastern margin. This unit may yield small quantities of water to wells but is not an important aquifer.

The estimated average specific yield of this groundwater subbasin is 10.4 percent (based on DWR San Joaquin District internal data and that of Davis 1959).

Restrictive Structures

Groundwater flow is generally southwestward in the eastern part of the subbasin and to the northwest in the southern portion, away from the recharge area along the San Joaquin River. During 1999, a groundwater mound occurred in the northwest portion of the subbasin with accompanying depressions to the north and south, and a large depression in the subbasin's southeast corner (DWR 2000). Based on current and historical groundwater elevation maps, groundwater barriers do not appear to exist in the subbasin.

Groundwater Level Trends

Changes in groundwater levels are based on annual water level measurements by DWR and cooperators. Water level changes were evaluated by quarter township and computed through a custom DWR computer program using geostatistics (kriging). On average, the subbasin water level has declined nearly 40 feet from 1970 through 2000. The period from 1970 through 1978 showed steep declines totaling about 30 feet. The nine-year period from 1978 to 1987 saw stabilization and rebound of about 25 feet, taking the water levels close to where they were in 1970. 1987 through 1996 again showed steep declines, bottoming out in 1996 at about 45 feet below 1970 levels. Water levels rose about 8 feet from 1996 to 2000. Water levels declines have been more severe in the eastern portion of the subbasin from 1980 to the present, but the western subbasin showed the strongest declines before this time period.

Groundwater Storage

Estimations of the total storage capacity of the subbasin and the amount of water in storage as of 1995 were calculated using an estimated specific yield of 10.4 percent and water levels collected by DWR and cooperators. According to these calculations, the total storage capacity of this subbasin is estimated to be 18,500,000 af to a depth of 300 feet and 40,900,000 af to the base of fresh groundwater. These same calculations give an estimate of 12,600,000 af of groundwater to a depth of 300 feet stored in this subbasin as of 1995 (DWR 1995). According to published literature, the amount of stored groundwater in this subbasin as of 1961 is 24,000,000 af to a depth of ≤ 1000 feet (Williamson 1989)

Groundwater Budget (Type B)

Although a detailed budget was not available for this subbasin, an estimate of groundwater demand was calculated based on the 1990 normalized year and data on land and water use. A subsequent analysis was done by a DWR water budget spreadsheet to estimate overall applied water demands, agricultural groundwater pumpage, urban pumping demand and other extraction data.

Natural recharge was estimated to be 21,000 af. Artificial recharge and subsurface inflow were not determined. Applied water recharge was calculated to be 404,000 af. Annual urban extraction and annual agricultural extraction were estimated as 15,000 af and 551,000 af, respectively. There were no other extractions, and subsurface outflow was not determined.

Groundwater Quality

Characterization. The majority of this subbasin is generally a calcium-sodium bicarbonate type, with sodium bicarbonate and sodium chloride at the western margin of the subbasin along the San Joaquin River (Mitten 1970). TDS values range from 100 to 6,400 mg/L, with a typical range of 200 to 400 mg/L. The Department of Health Services, which monitors Title 22 water quality standards, reports TDS values in 40 wells ranging from 100 to 400 mg/L, with an average value of 215 mg/L. EC values range from 180 to 600 μ mhos/cm, with an average value of 251 μ mhos/cm (based on 15 wells).

Impairments. There are localized areas of high hardness, iron, nitrate, and chloride. One well is currently undergoing GAC filtration for the removal of EDB/DBCP (Glos 2001).

Water Quality in Public Supply Wells

Constituent Group ¹	Number of wells sampled ²	Number of wells with a concentration above an MCL ³
Inorganics – Primary	44	0
Radiological	44	0
Nitrates	43	1
Pesticides	46	3
VOCs and SOCs	45	0
Inorganics – Secondary	44	7

¹ A description of each member in the constituent groups and a generalized discussion of the relevance of these groups are included in *California's Groundwater – Bulletin 118* by DWR (2003).

² Represents distinct number of wells sampled as required under DHS Title 22 program from 1994 through 2000.

³ Each well reported with a concentration above an MCL was confirmed with a second detection above an MCL. This information is intended as an indicator of the types of activities that cause contamination in a given basin. It represents the water quality at the sample location. It does not indicate the water quality delivered to the consumer. More detailed drinking water quality information can be obtained from the local water purveyor and its annual Consumer Confidence Report.

Well Characteristics

Well yields (gal/min)		
Municipal/Irrigation	Range: 40 – 4,750	Average: 750 – 2,000
Total depths (ft)		
Domestic		
Municipal/Irrigation	Range: 100 - 600	

Active Monitoring Data

Agency	Parameter	Number of wells /measurement frequency
DWR (incl. Cooperators)	Groundwater levels	378 Semi-annually
Department of Health Services (including cooperators)	Title 22 water quality	127 Varies

Basin Management

Groundwater management:	Discussions taking place between purveyors to create draft AB3030 Plan.
Water agencies	
Public	Gravelly Ford W.D., Madera I.D.; Root Creek W.D.
Private	None

References Cited

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Additional References

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